

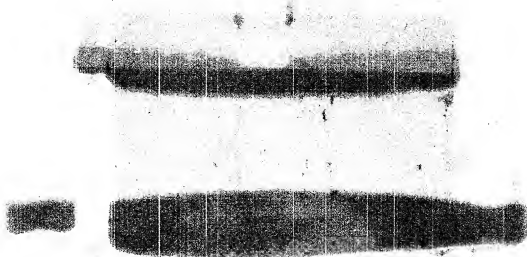
painfully from its effects. But though, as always in such cases, it was the younger and more ardent who received the deepest hurt, in later life Hubert had come to the belief that no man can fairly be blamed for having a narrow mind any more than for having a narrow chest, and after he had achieved his full liberation it is certain that all the personal bitterness had died out of his early memories.

Both at home and in the office these years were for Hubert full of deep difficulty and depression; his relations with his mother and his brother and his sisters were, however, so happy and intimate that they lightened all this period, and it is unquestionably true that it was just the stern experiences of this time that taught him concentration and self-discipline.

It was when he was about twenty that he first formed the determination to be a dramatist, and thenceforward nothing ever shook his conviction that he was going to be a successful one. The first time that he had ever been inside a theatre was one summer when at the age of fourteen he had gone from Wilmslow to visit some elderly relatives in London. He stayed in Camden Square and was taken to the Adelphi Theatre to see *The Streets of London*, and the performance in that play of Miss Clara Jecks in the part of the Cockney boy Dan filled him with the keenest delight. But this was in London, and when later on at home in Manchester he went to the play there were great heart-burnings about it. His father's habitual attitude towards even the most innocent forms of amusement had then become one of pained and solemn disapproval, and it will readily be understood, therefore, that the theatre called forth his severest reprobation. There were many painful scenes between them about it, conducted in a sombre tragedy strain; and when on the occasion of one of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry's rare visits to Manchester Hubert persisted, in spite of the parental displeasure, in going to see them in *The Merchant of Venice* all Will's Welsh ancestry rose up indignantly within him and he threatened his son with expulsion from the home.

Nevertheless, Hubert now never for a moment desisted from his ambition, and summer or winter, week-day or Sunday, it was only at the end of the evening, after the

THE PLAYS OF
HUBERT HENRY DAVIES
VOLUME ONE





HUBERT HENRY DAVIES.
at the age of thirty-six.

THE PLAYS OF
HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
HUGH WALPOLE

VOLUME ONE

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NOTE

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INTRODUCTION

I

HUBERT HENRY DAVIES was born on the 30th March 1869 at Woodley in Cheshire. He was the fourth child of William Henry and Martha Davies. William Henry Davies came of a long line of Welsh Nonconformist divines and was born at Ludlow, on the Shropshire border of Wales, in the year 1837. It would probably have been difficult to find any more remarkable survival of primitive Puritanism down the generations than that instanced by Will Davies and his ancestors. Since the days before the Commonwealth they had held fast their faith, permitting no development in respect either of its precept or its practice ; and in matters of doctrine and Sabbath observance Will Davies, at the end of the nineteenth century, saw eye to eye with the forefather who had been shot at in his Welsh pulpit for preaching Nonconformity at the beginning of the seventeenth. The problem for the student of heredity is—how did the writer of some of the gayest comedies in the English language come to grow on so stiff and uncompromising a stock ?

But though Hubert Henry's early environment was entailed upon him by the stern tradition of his father, he was by temperament much more akin to his mother. Martha Davies's father had begun life as a workman in an iron-foundry at Hyde in Cheshire, but having a strain of inventiveness in him he lifted himself out of this laborious level, dying in early middle age the master of his own ironworks. His wife, who came from the same humble class as himself, worked in her girlhood at a

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neighbouring cotton mill, only quitting her spindles the day before her marriage. From these parents Martha inherited a natural simplicity and dignity of character ; and without being in the least intellectual she was endowed with a fine and quick perception to which a temper was given by the admirable education which her father contrived for her. She suffered from great physical weakness almost all her life, and this, together with the rigid home discipline imposed by her husband, severely restricted both her own life and that of her young children.

The first years of young Hubert's life were spent in a smoky suburb of Manchester, where the distance was everywhere shut out by bricks and mortar and where the sky overhead was never clear. In those early days his only form of outdoor sport was running or walking on cinder roads and stone pavements, and his only contact with nature was the tending of a sycamore sapling and a monkey-flower plant that grew in the tiny plot of earth apportioned to him in the dreary back garden. When he was eight years old his family removed to Wilmslow, a Cheshire village some twelve miles from Manchester. Here for a space he knew the freedom of green fields and wide skies ; and it was during these impressionable years of his boyhood that he unconsciously absorbed the atmosphere that later on characterised his comedies of simple domestic life. Not that the people in his plays were ever drawn direct from life ; there is nowhere in his characterisation anything approaching to portraiture, though it may be noted in passing that the majority of the names he gave to his characters were locally familiar to him in the Wilmslow days. When he had reached the age of eleven he was sent to a little school in the village as preparatory to the Grammar School in Manchester, whither he soon departed ; but in 1886, the father's affairs having become seriously involved, the family went back again to live in Manchester, and at the age of seventeen Hubert was taken from school and put into business.

The story of his life could be told in very few lines. Outwardly it was singularly uneventful and devoid of incident, but between the end of his school days and the beginning of his success as a dramatist he lived through

years of very intense subjective drama—drama that was by no means chiefly comedy. During the long slow-moving time of boyhood his life had been a happy, humdrum affair enough, and the glamour of his own vivid vitality and imagination hid from him the extreme narrowness of his environment; but when youth came, quickening all the springs of his being and opening the eyes of his self-consciousness, he began to be aware of the larger possibilities which life contained, and thenceforward his soul entered into rebellion against the cramping traditions of his lot. When the time came for him to be broken into business he was, by a strangely unhappy prompting, put into his father's office to undergo the process. He had made no especial mark while at school and he now shone still less at business. He had not yet formed any definite idea of being a writer, but the whole atmosphere of commerce was utterly distasteful to him, and he never at any time in his life attempted to assume an interest in things which he did not feel. Nonchalance towards the processes of calico-printing on the part of a beginner was, naturally enough, very trying to his father, to whom a manner of business-like alertness was a matter of conscience rather than of temperament, and the relationship between father and son, never at any time a close or sympathetic one, began under the daily friction of office life to grow more strained and critical.

The vein of religious melancholy which Will Davies, the father, had inherited from his Welsh ancestors was, under stress of accumulating misfortune, developing into a state of morbid spiritual nervousness, which reacted upon his family in innumerable little acts of interference and discipline. While his children were in the stage of unthinking infancy his carefulness and kindness towards them had been never-failing, but as they grew to years of reason and began to form opinions of their own he failed to understand them or sympathise with them, and where he could not understand he knew no other way than to coerce and forbid. What this constant criticism and repression must have cost to a generous, sensitive temperament like Hubert's it is impossible to estimate. It was the clash of two diametrically opposed systems and temperaments; and both father and son suffered